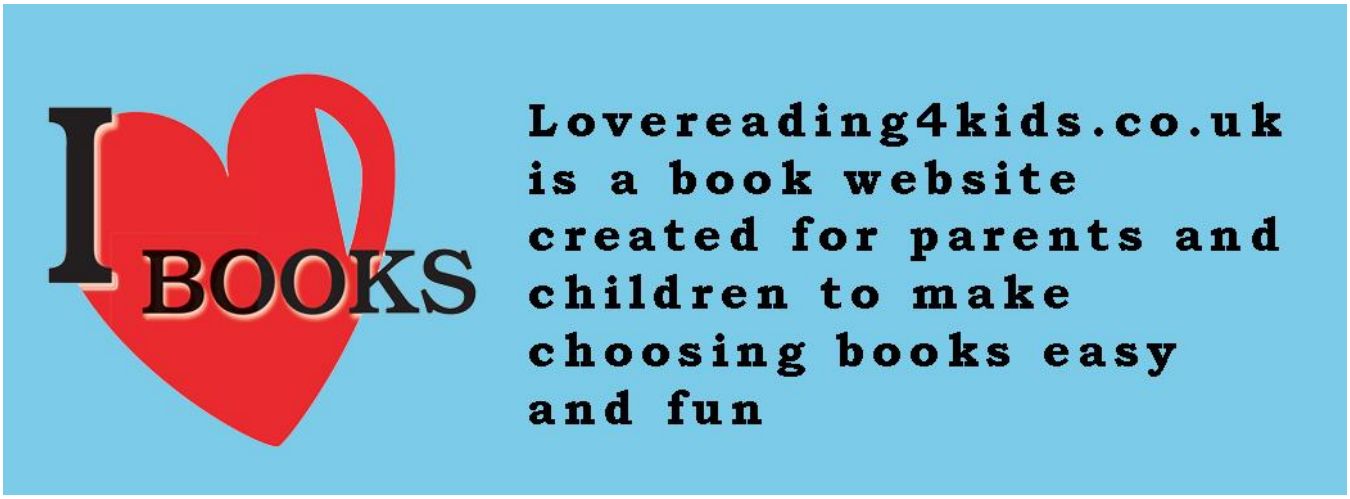


Opening extract from

Mabel Jones and the Forbidden City

Written by

Will Mabbit

Published by

Puffin an imprint of Penguin Books Ltd

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.



Supplied by Penguin Books Ltd



CHAPTER ONE

Fetch Her, My Foul Creepers

Mabel Jones scratched her armpit thoughtfully and peered through the bars at the **extraordinary** creature before her.

It's a funny-looking thing, all wrinkled and fat and helpless. Like a beetle grub. Kind of slimy, but kind of cute too.

Her baby sister, Maggie, snored gently and blew a snot bubble from her left nostril.

Babies can be quite disgusting, thought Mabel, absent-mindedly picking her own nose and

These uncorrected proofs are made available on a confidential basis and may not be sold or otherwise circulated

Supplied by Penguin Books Ltd



wiping her finger on the wall. Especially when you have to share a bedroom with one.

She yawned, climbed into bed and fell asleep, totally unaware that something quite **dreadful** was about to occur.

Which (of course) is why *we* are here.

Slide open the window and **squeeze** inside.

I think we're just in time. We wouldn't want to miss any dreadfulness.

Creep silently to the wardrobe and **press** your gristly earhole trimmings to the door. Can you hear the distant sound of drumming?

A **frenzied** beat.

It grows **louder** and **louder** still!

What's this? **Chanting too?**

Just when I thought it couldn't get any worse. This must be some kind of witchcraft.

I don't like this. I don't like this one bit.

Far, far away, a long fingernail scrapes along the words of a letter – a letter written during a previous, **most unlikely** adventure by the very same Mabel Jones we see now safe and snug, asleep in her room. A letter bottled and corked and thrown over the side of a pirate ship into the rolling seas. For months it bobbed on those waves,

These uncorrected proofs are made available on a confidential basis and may not be sold or otherwise circulated

Supplied by Penguin Books Ltd

years maybe, until it washed up on a far-away beach to be found, swapped, sold, stolen, then lost and found again, before it finally reached the hands of this strange and wicked creature.

Cracked and painted lips silently mouth the words of the letter. Then the fingernail pauses as it reaches the end of the final sentence, where an accidental memento has been left.



A single hair – a Mabel hair – is carefully removed from the letter and sniffed.

Fresh snuglet . . .

Fresh enough for dark magic.

The grim smile widens to reveal ancient crumbling teeth. The drumming has stopped. The chanting has died to a soft murmur. And now a voice speaks, in soft yet cracking tones – like honey poured thick on burnt toast – whispering an incantation:

'Fetch her, my foul creepers. Bring me the one called Mabel Jones . . .'

So brace yourself – for a wicked seed has been planted and, though its roots are firmly embedded in the future, its shoots and vines are winding through the hot and steaming mists of time into the present.

Quickly! Press your puny weight against those wardrobe doors, child. You must prevent this foulness from occurring.

Alas, it is futile. Your scrawny body is no match for the strength of dark magic.

It's time for the secret weapon. Have you brought the powdered beak of a heartbroken swan? Quickly mix it with your vial of hedgehog tears to make a paste, then mark the sacred sign upon –

What?

You don't have either of these things?

Really?

Really, really?

These uncorrected proofs are made available on a confidential basis and may not be sold or otherwise circulated

Supplied by Penguin Books Ltd

Then all is lost!

A thin white shoot sprouts through the gap between the wardrobe doors. It grows fast and strong, and splinters the wood. A vine has formed.

The vine branches.

Its branches branch.

Then those branches branch some more branches.

And the branches of the branches of the branches branch once more until the room is filled with curling vines that wrap and twist round bookcases and chair legs, pulling all they find closer to the open doors of the wardrobe, like the tentacles of a *starving octopus*.

Up the walls they creep . . .

Across the ceiling they wind . . .

All searching for one thing.

Fetch her, my foul creepers.

They reach the bed.

Bring me the one called Mabel Jones!

A vine curls beneath the duvet, questing for the sleeping Mabel contained within.

Gripping round her ankles.

Tightening round her wrists.

These uncorrected proofs are made available on a confidential basis and may not be sold or otherwise circulated

Supplied by Penguin Books Ltd

Then with evil purpose the creepers tuck the duvet into place. Mabel is wrapped up, still snoring, like a sausage roll made with girl instead of pig parts. And slowly but surely the bundled snuglet is pulled towards the wardrobe.

Who knows what lies in store for a young girl stolen from her bed by the foul creepers of an evil enchantress?

Could this be the end for Mabel Jones?

A toe poking from beneath the duvet catches on a line of thread stretched tight above the floor, looped round a nail hammered into the skirting board, then stretched upward and tied to a precariously balanced tin of coppers.

KERCHANGACHANG!!!



A booby trap! Set by clever, resourceful Mabel Jones. She has had some experience of unlikely adventures such as these. If you have been snatched from your bedroom once, then it pays to take great care it never happens again.

Mabel Jones was woken by a sudden noise.

She had been having a strange dream that she was being dragged into the wardrobe by the tendrils of an evil creeping vine. Then she realized it wasn't a nightmare.

It was **really happening**.

She opened her mouth to scream, but a thick vine covered her face, smothering her cry for help. Mabel, a skilled vegetarian, bit down hard and tore off a fleshy chunk of plant with her teeth.

Vile and bitter sap filled her mouth, like she had just swigged on a bottle of nit lotion. The bitten vine recoiled, spilling sap on the bedroom carpet.

These uncorrected proofs are made available on a confidential basis and may not be sold or otherwise circulated

Supplied by Penguin Books Ltd

Mabel bit another vine and her arm was free. Free enough to grab a nearby shoe and use it to hammer at the vines that dragged her towards the wardrobe. Vine by vine she fought the plant, until she was sitting in a pool of mushed and mangled stems. The creepers were retreating now, shrinking back into the wardrobe. The spell was broken.

Mabel sat panting in the remains of her bedroom.

My name is Mabel Jones, and I am not scared of anything.

But something is wrong, Mabel.
Something precious is missing.
Something very precious indeed.
'My matchbox full of toenail clippings!'
Four years' work – gone.
And something else, Mabel?
'Oh, and the cot is empty.'

MAGGIE IS GONE!

Mabel's sister, sleeping soundly, stood no chance. Plucked from her cot and dragged into the wardrobe, along with a Tupperware box of Lego, Mabel's recorder and, of course, the toenail-clipping collection.

Look!

The final vine is disappearing back into the wardrobe! Mabel leaps to stop it. Maggie Jones may well be a slightly inconvenient and annoying baby sister, but she is *Mabel's* slightly inconvenient and annoying baby sister.

She grabs the vine and for a moment she holds it fast.



These uncorrected proofs are made available on a confidential basis and may not be sold or otherwise circulated

Supplied by Penguin Books Ltd

'GIVE. ME. BACK. MY. SISTER!'

Then the vine tugs, sudden and swift, and Mabel falls forward into the wardrobe – into a hot, steaming mist, her fingers still gripped round the end of the tendril.

Somewhere in the distance, the familiar sound of a wailing baby can be heard.

MAGGIE!

Then the vine snaps, weakened by the earlier bites of the desperate Mabel Jones.

And
she is falling...

Falling away from the cries of her baby sister . . . **Falling into darkness.**



And then, with a thump, she is back in her wardrobe!

Actually, this isn't my wardrobe . . .

This is the inside of a **completely different** wardrobe!

These uncorrected proofs are made available on a confidential basis and may not be sold or otherwise circulated